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**Senate Judiciary Committee Hearing on SB 250  
Violence against Healthcare Professionals  
March 19, 2013**

**Testimony by Ken Fletcher, Associate Executive Director, MNA**

Good afternoon Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee. On behalf of the Michigan Nurses Association, I appreciate the opportunity to testify in support of Senate Bill 250.

Violence against on-duty health care professionals is increasing at an alarming rate. Since this committee first took up similar legislation last session, we have had several nurses who have been attacked or threatened. Nurses have had knives pulled on them, arms broken, faces punched and wheelchairs rammed into them.

We have found that incidents of violence are so prevalent in Michigan hospitals that many of our nurses don't even bother to report events to us. When a member had a knife pulled on her in the emergency department of one of our hospitals, we found out about the earlier incident where a member had their arm broken by a patient.

When we investigated an incident where a member in another hospital had a wheelchair rammed into her, we found the nurse who had been punched in the face.

When this committee dealt with similar legislation last session, you heard testimony from Terri Thuss, who is a nurse who works in an emergency department at a community hospital up north. Terri told the story of how she was attacked one day by a combative and hostile patient. Terri and two other hospital employees were injured by that day. Terri injured her upper back and left shoulder area and feared that she would never be able to return to work. Fortunately for Terri, she was able to return to the job that she loves, but had to endure almost a year of pain and uncertainty. Her assailant got not much more than a slap on the wrist. He was fined and served a week in jail.

The Emergency Nurses Association reports that more than half of emergency department nurses have been physically assaulted at work. These episodes include being spit on, hit, pushed, shoved, scratched or kicked while on the job.

They also found that one in four nurses have experienced such violence more than 20 times in the past three years. Just as alarming, one in five nurses have experienced verbal abuse more than 200 times during the same period.

According to the U.S. Department of Labor, "Workplace violence is a serious occupational hazard, ranking among the top four causes of death in workplaces during the past 15 years.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics found that more than 3,000 people died from workplace homicide between 2006 and 2010 and an average of more than 15,000 nonfatal workplace injury cases was reported annually during this time.

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration found that hospitals in New York and Massachusetts have had a number of employees killed due to a high volume of assaults. As you can see, this is not just a growing Michigan problem, it's nationwide.

Hospitals need to take the safety of their employees and patients seriously. Security measures need to be put in place to prevent as many of these incidents as possible. Proper help and support needs to be provided to the employees who are harmed on the job.

Senate Bill 250 may not prevent many of these attacks from happening, but it will hold those who do harm workers accountable for their actions. They deserve more than the slap on the wrist that was received by the man who attacked Terri Thuss. We don't allow people to attack our public safety personnel. We shouldn't allow them to attack health care providers either.

Thank you very much for considering this important legislation. I hope that you will vote yes on Senate Bill 250 today and support those who care for us when we are sick.

Testimony provided by Terri Thuss, RN

Tuesday, September 20<sup>th</sup>, 2011

Senate Judiciary Committee Meeting re: SB 642 and SB 643

Good afternoon, Senators. I am honored to speak to you, but saddened also. I am a victim of violence in the workplace.

On February 7th, 2011, I was working in the emergency department at ARMC (Alpena Regional Medical Center). At approximately 5:00 am, a patient entered our lobby throwing beer cans and acting belligerent. Security arrived and escorted him to one of our exam rooms to be evaluated by the doctor. Once in the exam room, the patient became uncooperative by pushing the security guard and attempting to go toward other patients' rooms. The patient was yelling, swearing, swinging his arms and throwing things. This patient was assigned to me, so I attempted to defuse the situation by talking and steering him away from the other patients to prevent them from injury. During this conversation a code "gray" was called (which means uncooperative patient, nurse needs assistance now)...promptly after which the police were called.

The police arrived fairly quickly and subdued the patient to the ground. Now we have five police officers, security, housekeeping, a clinical assistant and three nurses attempting to contain this combative patient to a safe, secure area. The patient continued to be combative and hostile, even though he had been placed in hand cuffs. Once we got the patient onto the cart and returned him to the exam room, the police remained by his bedside assisting in the restraint. This was done to prevent the patient from injuring himself. He continued fighting all staff. At that point the patient was given medication to try to defuse the situation. The medication was administered by injection while the police continued to hold down the hostile patient. The doctor ordered a blood test and IV fluids. Have you ever tried to hit a moving target that is flailing and jerking all over?

As a result of this incident three staff members were injured, including me. From all of the pushing and pulling, I injured my upper back and left shoulder area. The doctors tell me the trapezes and rhomboid muscles were torn in a "V" during the struggle. It has since healed back together, but not correctly. This has caused atrophy in these muscles. This means that the blood supply has been reduced to the affected muscles, which in turn causes the muscles to die. I now suffer with daily pain and have an area in my

back that is essentially sunken. At this point, I am unable to work due to the pain. I have seen too many specialists and they can't fix the problem. The other nurse that was injured tore all the ligaments and tendons in her right elbow. She required surgery and is currently going through (physical) therapy to rehab her arm.

We were told the next day that this patient was a former cage fighter. He was 23 years old and very strong. Senators, I hope that you will pass bills 642 and 643 to help prevent violence in the workplace. Being a nurse is what I have always dreamed of since I was a little girl. When that dream finally came true I was so proud to say I am a Registered Nurse. I am unable to perform my job since this injury occurred. Senators, stop and think. What if someone told you that you couldn't work in the legislative system anymore? How would you feel? Being a nurse is a big part of who I am. At this point I don't know if I am ever going to be able to go back to working as a nurse. This is very near and dear to my heart. I feel like this person has stolen my livelihood and I am angry that the law doesn't protect healthcare professionals. There are laws for murder and drunk driving, so please help us get protection for healthcare professionals.

The patient was charged with six different counts and agreed to a plea bargain for two counts. The abusive patient received one week in jail with one day served and then deferred one year, a suspended license, one weekend in rehab, and paid a fine for his acts of hostility. If the guidelines had been in place, perhaps he would have gotten stiffer penalties. The penalty he received was nothing more than a slap on the wrist. This patient is free to live life to the fullest and I am left to live with pain and uncertainty of my future.

Some people might argue that the legislation will not be able to completely prevent outbreaks of violence toward health care professionals. While that is true, it is my hope that this legislation will act as a strong deterrent, in addition to punishing those who physically mistreat health care professionals when they are doing their job. I have come to terms with the fact that bills 642 and 643 will not help me, but knowing that they may protect other healthcare professionals in the future gives me a little satisfaction.

Thank you for letting me share my story and, again, I hope you will consider passing these bills to help protect all healthcare professionals.